Pope Francis Offers Advice to Gay Couple

Pope Francis has delivered mixed messages on LGBTQ+ issues, but Italian gay couple Andrea Rubera and Dario De Gregorio say he’s done an important favor for their family.

Rubera, in a recent interview with the National Catholic Reporter, said the men were initially reluctant to enroll their children in a program to learn the Catholic catechism — basically, the faith’s doctrine — at a Rome-area church. They feared the kids would be subjected to bias because of having two dads.

In April 2015, when Rubera and De Gregorio were considering the matter, Rubera received an invitation to attend the pope’s daily Mass. He decided to go, and he brought a letter to Francis seeking advice.

A few days later, he received a call from none other than the pope. Francis told him, “I think you should do it,” Rubera recounted to the Reporter. “Go to the pastor, ask for a meeting, introduce yourself transparently, and I’m quite confident that everything is going to be all right.”

That turned out to be good advice. The children found a welcoming atmosphere in the program (not all LGBTQ+ people or their children have had such positive experiences with Catholic institutions). Now all three of Rubera and De Gregorio’s kids have learned the catechism, and they are participating in Mass as altar servers, who assist the priest.

The pope’s counsel “really helped me in coming out of a cul-de-sac,” Rubera said. He has written another letter to Francis, telling him about the children’s progress, but he doesn’t expect another phone call.

Rubera and De Gregorio also have a connection to the pope’s statement in support of civil unions for same-sex couples, which received much publicity last fall. The statement was featured in the documentary Francesco, directed by Evgeny Afineevsky and released in October, in a segment in which Rubera discussed the dilemma he and his husband faced about sending their children to the catechism program. Francis told Afineevsky he supported civil unions as a way to assure rights for same-sex couples and their families. He had made similar comments on other occasions, but this was his highest-profile statement on the matter since he became pope.

While Francis has adopted a conciliatory tone toward LGBTQ+ people, including supportive words to those who have met with him, he has upheld church doctrine, which considers same-gender sexual relations sinful and expects the faithful to abstain. The church likewise opposes gender transition, considering gender fixed at birth and immutable.

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